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RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Written statement*/ submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 March 2000]

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*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Violation of Human Rights in Ethiopia

Since 1994 Ethiopians have had a democratic constitution that guarantees their country's citizens full civil and human rights. Despite this constitution, which many regard as exemplary, human rights violations have increased in number and severity. The victims have in particular been members of the Oromo community, numbering 25 million and representing approximately 40% of the total population. If intellectuals, teachers, journalists, aid agency workers, artists, human rights activitists and peasant farmers are subjected to human rights abuses solely on the basis of their ethnic origin, then Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker believes that the Ethiopian authorities are guilty of racism. The widespread persecution suffered by members of this ethnic community, who are collectively suspected of being supporters of the opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) liberation movement, has not been diminished by the fact that the incumbent President of Ethiopia, Negasso Gidada, is an Oromo.

Police harrassment, arbitrary arrests without charge or trial, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions are an everyday experience for many Oromo. Oromo human rights organisations have documented 2,500 politically-inspired killings of Oromo and over 800 cases of disappearances in recent years. Peasant farmers, rarely if ever politically active, have particularly frequently figured among the victims. For example Soorsaa Gammoo, a farmer from Genale (Bale), died in Karchale prison in Addis Abeba on 5 August 1999 as a consequence of torture endured since he was imprisoned in 1995. Two of his sons have disappeared and not been seen since. On 14 August 1999 Obbo Hinsarmu, a member of the Oromo self-help and cultural organisation Macha Tulama, was detained by members of the security forces. We have followed the case of Mossisa Duressa with particular concern. The 55-year-old chairperson of the Ethiopian Red Cross in Nekemte and personnel director of the Mekane Yesus Church was arrested on 15 August 1999. Police and security authorities have refused to reveal his whereabouts. The same day the physician Dr Tassew Begashaw was also imprisoned, accused of having treated alleged members of the OLF.

In the light of these grave violations of human rights we are calling on the UN Commission for Human Rights to urge Ethiopians to cease treating the Oromo as collectively suspected of being OLF supporters and stop persecuting them solely on grounds of their ethnic origin immediately. In addition the Ethiopian government should be urged to stop harassing and outlawing Oromo aid and human rights organisations, to release political prisoners without delay and to ensure that the Oromo too are guaranteed the civil and human rights enshrined in the Ethiopian constitution.